

Testimony of John Hamilton

School Counselor, Sacred Heart Jr/Sr High School, Salina

Before the House Health and Human Services Committee

March 4, 2025

Chair Carpenter and Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is John Hamilton, and I am the school counselor at Sacred Heart Jr/Sr High School in Salina. I work with students in grades 7-12, guiding them through academic challenges, social pressures, stresses of college and career, and mental health struggles that no teenager should have to face alone. I am here in strong support of HB 2236 because I have seen firsthand how school-based mental health services change—and even save—lives.

There is an urgent battle unfolding at the intersection of our communities and schools, to support an increasingly anxious generation of students. This endeavor is both noble and sobering. It's noble because it's bringing us all together (educators, families, and community members) to meet these challenges in spite of significant personnel shortages and mounting pressures. Yet, it's sobering because we recognize the gravity of the situation: without strong Partnerships, we risk failing the very children we've committed to serve.

At Sacred Heart, we are fortunate to partner with Central Kansas Mental Health Center and two local therapists who provide case management and therapy during the school day. When a student is in crisis—whether they are battling depression, processing the loss of a Parent, or dealing with overwhelming anxiety—they don't have to wait weeks or travel long distances to get help. They can receive professional support right in our school, in a familiar and safe environment.

HB 2236 represents a critical investment in Kansas's future. This legislation is not merely a fiscal allocation; it's a commitment to nurturing the mental health and resilience of our youth. By passing this bill, we affirm our dedication to creating a stronger, more supportive environment for the next generation of Kansans.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Kansas' youth.